

Development of animal welfare guidelines for production systems (terrestrial animals)

Discussion paper developed by the OIE Animal Welfare Working Group, 2006

General Comments:

- 1) The United States supports the general direction the Animal Welfare Working Group (AWWG) is taking to address the development of guidelines for production systems for terrestrial animals. The introduction of subjectivity must be avoided if any guidelines that are drafted are to be internationally accepted. The United States therefore encourages the AWWG to carefully focus on developing well grounded, science based guidelines that are practical and feasible to implement.
- 2) As the OIE begins to develop specific recommendations, the United States encourages the AWWG to review existing species-specific welfare guidelines that have already been developed and adopted by international scientific and industry associations. For example, the guidelines developed by the United Egg Producers for layer hens have been reviewed and are supported by the International Egg Commission and several other countries. Much work went into reviewing the science as well as other factors noted in this OIE discussion paper. The web link to where these guidelines can be found is:

<http://www.uepcertified.com/abouttheprogram.html>

Background

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Nonetheless, because of the close link between animal welfare and animal health, guidelines designed to improve animal welfare will often lead to better animal health, productivity and food safety. Especially in cases where these relationships can be clearly demonstrated, animal welfare guidelines may be broadly acceptable to member countries.

Comment: The statement that “food safety” will be improved as a result of guidelines that improve animal welfare is questioned. While one might be able to quantify improved food *quality* as a result of improved animal welfare, can it be proven that food safety will improve as a result of improved animal welfare?

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Clarifying the objectives of animal welfare guidelines

Animal welfare guidelines are generally designed to achieve one or more of three objectives:

1. to protect the basic health and normal functioning of animals, for example by preventing and alleviating disease, injury, malnutrition and similar harm;
2. to protect the psychological well-being of animals, for example by preventing and alleviating pain, fear, distress and discomfort;
3. to provide living conditions that are considered to be 'natural' for the species, for example by providing a social and physical environment where animals can perform key elements of their natural behaviour.

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Standards based on objective 1, because they reinforce basic health and functioning of animals, tend to be the most aligned with the traditional objectives of animal producers and veterinarians. The cost/benefit ratio is often favourable because implementation often leads to measurable improvements in productivity (e.g. improved survival or reduced mortality due to stress and disease). Hence, these standards are likely to be the most acceptable to animal producers and in cultures where concern for the welfare of animals is relatively low. However, in cultures where the public is actively interested in and concerned about animal welfare, standards based on objective 1 are likely to be viewed as minimum standards that promote productivity rather than animal welfare per se.

Comment: The highlighted text implies that modern intensive production (a producer of any kind for that matter) has low concern for the welfare of animals. The authors and the audience should realize modern intensive producers have adapted existing practices specifically for the welfare of animals.

Standards based on objective 2 (alleviating pain and distress, etc.) vary in their ease of implementation and their economic implications. Some (such as handling animals in ways that do not cause distress) should be relatively easy to implement, involve little or no cost, and may produce measurable economic benefit. Others (such as requiring anaesthesia for minor surgery) may be difficult and costly to implement. The level of acceptance by producers will likely vary accordingly. In countries which accord a high priority to animals welfare, standards based on objective 2 tend to be strongly supported by the concerned public who generally see the alleviation of pain and distress as a key element of animal welfare.

United States Comments – Terrestrial Animal Health Standards Commission
March 2007 Report

Comment: Again, an objection is noted to the implication of this phrasing – the implication that modern intensive production is any less concerned for the welfare of the animal. Reducing pain and distress is certainly a laudable goal, but alleviating all pain and distress is not reasonable. No human is without some level of stress. Is it reasonable to expect animals would live without any stress?

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